

System poses a spectrum of problems
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Amateur radio users aren't the only ones affected by broadband over power line technology. The service coming to Manassas that will allow subscribers to access the Internet by plugging a modem into any city outlet might interfere with many types of short-wave radio uses.

The technology will be installed city-wide within a few months, making Manassas the first city in the United States to expand its pilot program to a full-scale operation.

Concerned radio users from around the country warn about the harmful nature of the technology, which operates over the existing city power lines at a frequency of two to 80 megahertz.

Amateur radio operator and electrical engineer John Shea has been voicing his opinion on BPL, including in a letter to United States Senator and democratic presidential candidate John Edwards. Shea and others said BPL will make foreign radio stations inaudible.

"If this becomes reality, my grandchildren will never have the opportunity to listen to the shortwave broadcasts from foreign lands," said the North Carolina resident.

Woodbridge resident Alex Fraser said many people listen to those shortwave broadcasts. "(BPL) is a pretty bad thing," he said.

Colorado resident Ralph D'Andrea worried that some law enforcement and government radio operations will be affected. Dave Sumner, Chief Executive Officer of the American Radio Relay League, said some state and federal agencies and the Red Cross will be affected, as well as other broadcasting, aeronautical, maritime and military users.

Sumner also said citizen's band, or CB radios, which operate around 27 MHz, may see interference as well.

Manassas Police Chief John Skinner said police, fire and rescue radio normally operate in the 800-900 MHz range, far away from BPL frequencies. "The separation between that spectrum and the low-band 30-50 MHz spectrum is so great, that it is my understanding that there is no potential for interference," said Skinner.

Dick Ertman, a former Lockheed Martin electronic interference specialist, said television channels two through six may be affected by BPL, as well as older cordless phones. Some older alarm system equipment, baby monitors and model airplanes may also be affected by BPL interference.

ARRL technical expert Ed Hare also said international shortwave broadcast, CB radio, aeronautical, radio astronomy; military and other government use, commercial and business use, police and fire departments, and broadcast television above 54 MHz operate in the BPL range. Hare said there is "significant use" of that spectrum.

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This story can be found at:

http://www.manassasjm.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=MJM%2FMGArticle%2FWPN_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1031771762771&path=!news